

## APPENDIX G: MOUTH OPENERS AND MOUTH GAGS

The mouth openers will enable you to open the turtle's mouth. The mouth gags will maintain your access inside a turtle's mouth so you can remove any hooks and / or line. When a turtle with an internal hook injury is brought on board, it will more than likely have its mouth open. If the animal is not voluntarily opening its mouth, there are a few mouth opening techniques you can apply:

### Mouth Opening Techniques

1. Block the turtle's nostrils to make the turtle breath through its mouth.
2. Tickle the throat or pull outward on the throat skin.
3. Cover the nostrils and apply light pressure to the anterior corner of the eye socket with one hand and apply firm pressure in the throat area with your other hand.

If you still cannot open the mouth, use the rope or the avian speculum as mouth openers:

### MOUTH OPENERS



### Rope with Protected Tubing

Slide the rope with the protected tubing in between the jaws and move it until the back of the mouth. Care should be taken to avoid contact with the eyes.



Photo by NMFS Galveston



Photo by NMFS Galveston

### **Avian Speculum**

Slide the avian speculum flat inside the turtle's mouth and rotate it. Notice that the speculum is stepped and can be used for different sized turtles by selecting for its different widths. This mouth opener can be used only on the smallest of the animals.



Photo by NMFS Galveston



Photo by NMFS  
Galveston

### **MOUTH GAGS**

Once the mouth is opened, you must safely secure it open while you work to remove the line and hook, if possible. There are a number of devices provided for this purpose:

#### **Hank of Rope**

Position the lanyard in the posterior corner of the jaw to keep the mouth open. Alternatively, you can place the rope across the entire width of the mouth and block both sides of the jaw.



Photo by NMFS  
Galveston

#### **PVC Splice Couplings**

Insert the appropriate PVC splice coupling inside the turtle's mouth. Hold the pipe steady with a pair of pliers to stabilize it inside the mouth. In order to prevent the pipe from interfering with the dehooking devices, thread the line through the pipe before inserting it.



Photo by NMFS  
Galveston

## Nylabones

Position the proper size nylabone in the posterior corner of the jaw to keep the mouth open. The larger bones are easy to hold but block access to much of the mouth. Smaller bones don't reduce your view inside a turtle's mouth and work equally well.



Photo by NMFS Galveston

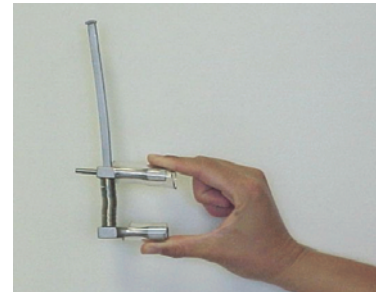
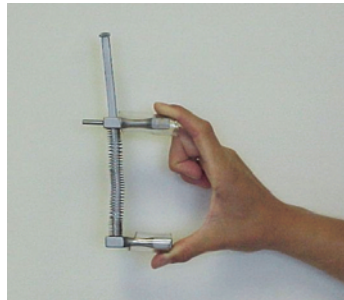


Photo by NMFS Galveston

## Canine Mouth Gag

The canine mouth gag's arms are compressible when they are perpendicular to the main axis. The rubber feet on the gag lock nicely into the groove on the upper and lower premaxilla. When the turtle bites down on the extremity of the arms, they will rotate from being perpendicular and therefore will lock. Nevertheless, there are cases where turtles have been able to compress the gag.

We have provided you with 3 sizes of gags. Use the smallest one possible while maintaining the integrity of the device (from being crushed). Compress the gag and insert it in the turtle's mouth. When the turtle opens its mouth, the gag will also expand. Do not force the turtle's mouth open all the way, let the spring tension on the gag and turtle's own mouth movement set the maximum open position. Position the mouth gag at the front center of the jaw with the axis off to one side to provide the maximum open working area in the mouth and the surest footing for the gag. Note that this type of gag frees both of your hands.



These pictures show the maximum and minimum length of the mouth gag.



Photo by NMFS Galveston



Photo by NMFS Galveston



Photo by NMFS Beaufort

### **Brush Wood Handle**

Position the brush wood handle in the posterior corner of the jaw to keep the mouth open. Soak the wooden handle first to soften it which decreases the damage to the beak.

Keep in mind that different mouth openers will block your view inside the mouth in various ways. Therefore, select which mouth opener will best suit the dehooking or disentanglement procedure that



Photo by NMFS Miami

you need to perform. You can improve your visibility at the back of the turtle's mouth and upper esophagus by using the needle-nose pliers. After securing the mouth open, gently slide the pliers in the closed position forwards into the "throat" and separate the pliers' jaws to open the "throat".